THE

FIRST OF A SERIES

OF

LECTURES

DELIVERED AT THE MECHANICS' INSTITUTION, SOUTHAMPTON BUILDINGS, CHANCERY LANE, NOV. 27TH, 1846,

ON THE ACTUAL CONDITION OF THE

METROPOLITAN GRAVE-YARDS.

BY GEO. ALFD. WALKER, SURGEON;

MEMBER OF SEVERAL LEARNED AND SCIENTIFIC SOCIETIES, AND AUTHOR OF "GATHERINGS FROM GRAVE-YARDS," "THE GRAVE-YARDS OF LONDON," "INTERMENT AND DISINTERMENT," "BURIAL-GROUND INCENDIARISM," "A PRACTICAL CHART OF DISEASES OF THE SKIN," "THE CURE OF ULCERS BY FUMIGATION," "THE WARM VAPOUR CURE," ETC.

"No burying-places should be tolerated within cities or towns, much less in or about CHURCHES an CHAPELS. This custom is excessively injurious to the inhabitants, and especially to those who frequent public worship in such CHAPELS and CHURCHES. God, decency, and health forbid this shocking abomination." * * * From long observation I can attest that CHURCHES and CHAPELS situated in grave-yards, and those especially within whose walls the dead are interred, are perfectly unwholesome; and many, by attending such places, are shortening their passage to the house appointed for the living. What increases the iniquity of this abominable and deadly work is, that the burying-grounds attached to many CHURCHES and CHAPELS are made a source of PRIVATE GAIN. The whole of this preposterous conduct is as indecorous and unhealthy as it is profane. Every man should know that the gas which is disengaged from putrid flesh, and particularly from a human body, is not only unfriendly to, but destructive of, animal life. Superstition first introduced a practice which self-interest and covetousness continue to maintain."—DR. ADAM CLARKE'S Commentary on Luke vii v. 12-15.

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LECTURES

ON THE

METROPOLITAN GRAVE-YARDS.

LADIES AND GENTLEMEN,

We have met together this evening for the purpose of discussing the moral and physical effects arising from the practice of interring the DEAD in the midst of the LIVING.

That such a practice inevitably leads to results which inflict deep injury on public morals, and are highly detrimental to the HEALTH of the community, it will be my duty to demonstrate.

It seems strange that in the middle of the nineteenth century,—in the capital of the civilized world,—in a country distinguished for its respect for public decency,—for high moral feeling, and, above all, for its profession of Christian principles, any necessity should exist for an appeal on the question which we are about to discuss. Yet such is the fact. Scarcely a day passes without our witnessing the most revolting violations of the sanctuaries of the dead, whilst the hundreds of burying-places of this huge Metropolis, permitted to exist in the midst of its living population, are so many centres of infection, laboratories of malaria, whence issue most offensive and deadly compounds, the gaseous products of human putrefaction, the food, if not the principles, of malignant disease and premature death.

If I establish, as I believe I shall, these propositions, we are bound by a double motive to use every exertion for the removal of this dark stain—this foul blot, from our national character. As Christians, we are called upon to crush, and that for ever, a system that *necessarily entails* and *imposes* the daily execution of deeds, from the perpetration of which barbarians would recoil with abhorrence. As men, as members of a civilized community, it is our duty to remove constantly increasing causes of discomfort, disease, and frequently inconceivable suffering, existing more espe-

cially among our poorer brethren, whose poverty, and whose avocations, too frequently compel their residence in localities where the evil is most prominent,—where, in a word, the burying-places, public and private, are most numerous and most dangerously overcharged. During many years I have employed every legitimate means for the purpose of effecting this great MORAL and SANATORY reformation; and this, my first effort in another direction, has been cheerfully entered upon at the request of the Committee of this Institution, in humble but full confidence that at the conclusion of these Lectures sympathies newly awakened, and judgments more fully informed, may result in such an expression of opinion as shall convince—unmistakably convince—all but the unduly prejudiced or the deeply interested that the confidence of a too generous public may neither be systematically abused, nor insulted with impunity. To that ultimate arbitrator, public opinion, I now therefore confidently and trustingly appeal. I have the most complete conviction that the voice of the people will be put forth in its might, and that ere long the complete abolition of a system that afflicts while it disgusts, that weighs down the energies of the strong, imperils the life of the weak, and lowers the standard of vitality in the aggregate population exposed to its influence, will be demanded of the Imperial Legislature.

After considerable reflection, I have thought that the observations contained in this Lecture would be more practical, and therefore more valuable, if they brought under your notice the actual condition of our grave-yards, rather than instituted a comparison between the ancient and modern modes of burial. The comparison would be more curious than useful, and I believe our time may be much better bestowed in dealing with things as they are in the nineteenth century, in the most magnificent city of the world, than in entering upon a disquisition which might lead us astray from our present purpose. It is quite certain that any attempt to draw a parallel between the ancient heathen and the modern Christian in this respect would be infinitely to the disgrace and dishonour of the latter. With your permission, therefore, I will at once proceed to bring before you a chain of irrefragable evidence which will, I believe, demonstrate the existence of a state of things in some instances so dreadful and so disgusting as to defy comparison with any other social evil at present afflicting the community. I shall endeavour to be as concise as possible; but, believing as I do that the extent of the moral and sanatory evils resulting from the practice of intra-mural burial is even yet little known, and therefore not sufficiently appreciated, I must request your patient attention to a somewhat detailed statement of facts, because I believe a simple recital will influence your judgment better than laboured comments.

I should fail in the execution of a duty owing to the public and myself if, from a sense of delicacy, I hesitated to connect my previous labours in this cause with the testimony of the great majority of the witnesses

adduced by me before the Parliamentary Committee appointed to inquire into the Effect of Interment of Bodies in Towns. My writings, my evidence before the Select Committee on the Health of Towns in 1840, and the whole evidence tendered through me on this special inquiry in 1842, so mutually support and illustrate each other, that it would be impossible to do common justice to the subject were I to attempt to dissever them. I therefore shall have to refer, in the course of these remarks, to various allegations made from time to time in my works on this subject, and to the Reports of the Parliamentary Committees of 1840 and 1842, more especially to the latter.

You will, I trust, do me the justice to believe that profound conviction alone would have induced me to enter upon an inquiry at once repulsive and dangerous,—an inquiry involving some sacrifices of personal comfort, and a considerable expenditure of time and means. In justice to myself, I must also state, that I have not, nor ever had, the most remote interest in any place or places employed for the burial of the dead. I have no personal object in view, no private pique to gratify. My motives have, however, been impugned, my veracity slandered. I have been accused in terms as coarse as they were unmerited of intentional exaggeration,—of being the chief City agitator of the cemeteries; of having culled witnesses, as far as possible, to serve a purpose; of having set aside the whole body of respectable furnishing undertakers; and it has been further alleged, that the studied exclusion of such witnesses was one of the most striking and ominous parts of Mr. Mackinnon's procedure, or rather of Mr. Walker's, for he ruled the Committee. They formed the following ciphers; he, the leading integer. He sat beside Mr. Mackinnon, and whispered, and prompted, and practised all the dexterous parts of an able and experienced attorney guiding his counsel.

I believe that I need plead no excuse for having done what I considered at the time a simple act of duty, and, indeed, of obligation. I had earned the possession of certain facts in relation to the management of London burial-places. In the year 1839, I brought those facts before my countrymen, and I thought them of sufficient importance to press upon the attention of Parliament in 1842.

Those who have experienced the difficulty of awakening the public attention even to the existence of a palpable wrong, or the constant pressure of the grossest injury, will easily comprehend that the task I had imposed upon myself was not easy of accomplishment, whilst its consummation was apparently so remote as to offer little prospect of its fulfilment; yet, cheered on by the kind, I might add, the too flattering, commendations of the PRESS, a solemn belief of the vast, the incalculable interests interwoven with the subject, and a sincere conviction of my own rectitude of intention, I determined to wage war against one of the greatest

abominations that can afflict a community,—the burial of the DEAD in the midst of the LIVING! When I entered upon this crusade, I was prepared to expect opposition; I believed I might be the subject of insult. I have experienced both. Vested interests, however filthy their derivations, however abominable their sources, sometimes give evidence of uncommon vitality, even when they struggle for their very existence over the desecrated ashes of the dead.

I would willingly touch this portion of my subject with a light, nay, a charitable hand, but having been singled out for attack, having been accused of making a "VILE ATTEMPT TO IMPOSE UPON THE PUBLIC AND THE LEGISLATURE," having been assailed by the imputation that *I was utterly unworthy of belief in the representations I had made upon the subject*, I was compelled to act on the defensive. The grounds on which that defence was based you will become acquainted with as we proceed in our narrative.

For several years past, the conviction has been forcing itself on the public mind, that the practice of burying the dead in the midst of crowded cities and towns ought to be suppressed. It is, indeed, surprising that an evil of such magnitude should have been so long allowed to exist.

Among us, the ordinary dangers of interment are much increased by our manner of disposing of the dead. Grave after grave is dug in soil, frequently so overcharged with putrescent animal matter, that it is impossible to prevent the corruption of the atmosphere from the exhalations unavoidably arising from the frequent up-turning of the earth.

The condition of the majority of grave-yards and burying-places in London has been such for many years that they have not been capable of receiving the number annually requiring graves.

There are men who have unblushingly made the disposal of the dead a source of income, to an extent that few would believe. Some private speculators have long known that a freehold grave-yard is infinitely preferable, as a source of profit, to any other property.

There is scarcely a single grave-yard, vault, or receptacle for the dead in London that is not overcharged.

The burial-places of the metropolis and of the provinces have been under no superintendence! Public bodies or private individuals have been at liberty to allot grounds, or to choose depositories for the reception of the dead, without limitation as to number, without control as to locality, or the disposal of the charge with which they were intrusted; and it is proved that private individuals have availed themselves, to an alarming and most injurious extent, of the ignorance or poverty of survivors.

In some districts, during periods of increased heat, combined with moisture, the smell, exhaling from the surface of burial-grounds and from vaults under churches and chapels, has been so offensive, that property in the immediate neighbourhood has in consequence been materially depreciated.

In other localities, the most shameful practices are pursued by individuals who (in the absence of peremptory legal enactments to the contrary) mutilate and destroy bodies in various stages of decomposition, to the certain deterioration and destruction of the health of the living.

I am prepared to prove that the most disgraceful acts are perpetrated in burying-places in densely populated districts,—neighbourhoods, indeed, in which the filthy ill-ventilated condition of the streets and houses is such, that any additional causes of the corruption of the atmosphere should unquestionably not be permitted to exist.

Burial-places, long over-charged with dead, are yet in full operation. Individuals, totally disregarding the HEALTH of the PUBLIC, bury, or pretend to bury, the dead in places utterly incapable of containing the numbers entrusted to their charge, amounting, in some burying-grounds, to thirty on a Sunday alone.

The mortality of the Metropolis, at the present computation of 52,000 annually, will in five years be 260,000.

The lowest possible period that should be allowed for the destruction of the human body in graves, would be five years.

An acre of ground contains 43,560 square feet. If we divide this by 32, the number of square feet required for a single adult interment, we shall have 1,361 as the number of spaces left for graves in an acre of ground.

If the burying-grounds in London,* some of which have been in use for centuries, contain only 80 acres, portions of which have been pre-occupied by monuments, tombs, headstones, and otherwise, this space would receive and give burial to nearly 109,000 bodies,—a calculation which would leave, during any given five years, the mortality, as above stated, being 52,000 per annum, 151,000 bodies to be disposed of, or, in other words, uninterred!

It is thus demonstrated that bodies have been placed in spaces utterly inadequate to contain them; hence has resulted a shocking state of things, —the mutilation of bodies, the destruction of their coffins, with a host of immoral consequences and injurious results.

It is clearly demonstrable that the entire system of intra-mural interment in this empire is not merely a disgrace to our civilization, false in principle, and immoral in its tendencies, but injurious and destructive to the health of the community.

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* I speak here only of London proper, and in offering this as a calculation merely, I put, as I have a right to do, entirely out of the question many parochial and suburban (so-called) burial-grounds.

It would be an insult to the judgment of my readers to place in the category of cubical capacity such places as Spa-Fields grave-yard, the Enon Chapel receptacle, or many other *almost* equally shameful places, with whose actual condition I am almost as intimately acquainted as those who execute the so-called grave-digging therein; and I hesitate not to declare, that the practices necessarily pursued in many such receptacles are of so infamous and dangerous a character, as to demand their instant closure, and to call for the criminal punishment of the proprietors and their shameless agents.

From sources of information on which I have the fullest reliance, I am convinced that the state of things above described is not confined to the Metropolis, but exists in a proportionate degree in many other cities and towns of the empire, and that in Ireland, more especially, a large proportion of the burial-places are in a most shocking condition.

Although this subject involves many conflicting interests, and, perhaps, some prejudices, I believe it would not be found difficult to devise plans which, without for an instant losing sight of a most paramount necessity—the PUBLIC HEALTH, might be made available for the furtherance of objects which every reflecting person would rejoice to see accomplished.

If the burial of the dead were made a matter of State or police regulation, —if a grand and comprehensive scheme were organised (and I humbly submit that such might be done), the Government and the Clergy would, by introducing judicious arrangements in respect of the reception of the bodies, the mode and expense of transit, and the localities for the interment of the dead, deserve and receive the thanks of the community.

I am perfectly convinced that the many injurious consequences, unavoidably resulting from the present system of interring the dead, can only be removed by a legislative enactment, originating with or supported by Her Majesty's Government.

Such was the language I felt myself fully justified in employing in the month of January, 1842, when I addressed Sir James Graham, Her Majesty's then Secretary of State for the Home Department. Whether the Right Honourable Baronet's determination to grant a Committee of Inquiry was influenced by my communication, I know not.

In the succeeding February, the following petition was presented to the House of Commons by W. A. Mackinnon, Esq.:—

"THE HUMBLE PETITION OF GEORGE ALFRED WALKER, SURGEON,

"Showeth,—That your Petitioner has carefully inspected the majority of the places at present used for interment in the Metropolis, and is prepared to prove that for some years past they have been very inadequate for the reception of the dead.

"That your Petitioner would humbly invite the serious attention of your honourable House to the fact, that where the utmost vigilance should be exercised, and the greatest care employed, there is, under the present system of inhumation, an entire absence of every precaution; for, in the most densely populated districts, burial-places exist which are dangerously overcharged, and in many such localities bodies are placed one above another, and side by side, to the depth of 25 or 30 feet, the topmost coffins being but a few inches from the surface.

"That receptacles for the dead underneath or near churches or chapels, have been and continue to be crowded to an incredible extent; thus elaboratories of malaria are day and night in operation, and constantly diffusing their injurious products.

"That the placing of bodies in lead affords comparatively no protection to the health of the public; for, although the process of decomposition is less rapid under a medium temperature, as in vaults, the expansive force of the gas is such,

that the lids of coffins frequently become convex, and sometimes are rent asunder, and the gases thus and otherwise disengaged become diffused and mixed with the atmosphere, and enter the lungs in every inspiration.

"That in warmer climates, and in our own, exhalations from dead bodies have in many instances seriously injured health, and in some have immediately destroyed life. In confirmation of the latter assertion, your Petitioner would humbly direct the attention of your honourable House to the death of two men upon the opening of a grave in Aldgate church-yard, in the month of September, 1838, and to a yet more recent instance, in the death of William Green, a gravedigger of St. Margaret, Westminster, and the subsequent illness and death of the surgeon in attendance, and his female domestic, who both sank within a few days of the gravedigger.

"That your Petitioner is convinced, from long observation, that the keeping of dead bodies for a period of many days, and during warm weather, more particularly in densely populated and ill-ventilated neighbourhoods, is a practice highly injurious to the health of the living, and requires the interference of your honourable House.

"That from sources of information on which your Petitioner has the fullest reliance, he is convinced that the evils arising from the present system of interment are not confined to the Metropolis, but exist in a proportionate degree in the cities and populous towns throughout the kingdom, and in some of the dependencies of the British Empire.

"That your Petitioner believes he is performing a public duty in thus expressing his conviction, that the majority of the places for the interment of the dead are so many centres of infection, constantly giving off noxious effluvia, which, according to the circumstances of locality, atmosphere, and the power of resistance in those subjected to its influence, operate as a slow or energetic poison.

"Your Petitioner therefore humbly and earnestly prays, That a Committee of your honourable House may be appointed, or such other means employed as your honourable House in its wisdom may deem necessary, for the purpose of instituting a full and searching inquiry into the condition of the burial-places of the United Kingdom, your Petitioner believing that such evidence will be elicited as will convince your honourable House of the necessity of a revision or abrogation of the existing laws relative to burial, or of the total and absolute prohibition of the interment of the dead in the midst of the living."

The result of this Petition was the appointment of a Select Committee, of which W. A. Mackinnon, Esq. was named Chairman; the Committee commenced the examination of witnesses on the 17th of March, and concluded their labours on the 6th of May.

The Report of that Committee stated, that "*after a long and patient investigation, your Committee cannot arrive at any other conclusion than that the nuisance of interments in large towns, and the injury arising to the health of the community from the practice, are fully proved.*"

The resolution of the Committee shows that all the allegations contained in my Petition were substantiated, whilst the testimony accorded in the Report was to myself an acknowledgment of the services I had rendered.

Before endeavouring to bring more immediately under your notice some of the facts on which the above conclusion of the Committee was based, we may pass rapidly in review a few circumstances connected therewith.

Although I may fairly take occasion to express my regret that a question of such incalculable importance as that of the condition of the resting-places of the dead in the Metropolis should, up to the present period, have excited so little apparent attention, I am pleased to observe that recent events have again directed the public mind to a subject which, if I mistake not, will yet exact from the living the admission that it is not only irreligious and impolitic, but highly dangerous to sanction or permit the execution of such sacrilegious and abominable acts as have very recently been exposed in the columns of the daily press. The parishioners of St. Ann's, Soho, and St. George's, Bloomsbury, are bestirring themselves, whilst "the vestry meeting of St. Botolph, Aldgate, summoned on the 24th of September last, amongst other things, to elect a sexton, was obliged to separate without completing its purpose, there being no candidate for the office of sexton resident in the parish." It looks well for a parish containing a population of 9,525 souls that there was no *resident* candidate for the office; for as it is a compound one, and *should* include the duties of grave-digging, such as they are in the shamefully over-charged grave-yards of London, it argues a much improved condition of feeling, or appreciation rather, in the community of sextons. It looks well, therefore, I repeat, and is an earnest of better things, for when matters are at their worst, they sometimes mend.

If the Committee of rate-payers appointed to inquire into the condition of St. Ann's burying-ground and vaults would turn to pages 53 and 71 of the Parliamentary Report, "Effect of Interment of Bodies," they would find some evidence that might assist them in their deliberations, and may possibly go some way in forming their conclusions. It is the more necessary that this evidence should be had in remembrance, because it appears by the preliminary meeting that the "Churchwardens had examined the church-yard, and did not find it worse than it had been for the last four or five years, and they did not see the necessity of a new church-yard, which would necessarily entail on the parish a very considerable expense."*

We obtain some valuable information from the statements made before the Committee by Bartholomew Lyons, an ex-gravedigger of St. Ann's, Soho. This man proved that graves 20 feet in depth are dug by order of the Board of Vestry on purpose to make the ground last longer. That they sometimes break up the old coffins. He further states, that from every deep grave dug, coffin-wood sufficient to fill a dozen wheelbarrows was broken up. That a wretch named Fox had "done most wonderful things in the vaults; he has been (he says) the biggest brute of any gravedigger in this earth, and he suffered for it at last; he died in the Strand union workhouse actually rotten."

Lyons, who gave his, I believe, honest testimony against practices that would disgrace, if not disgust, a cannibal, died about two years since, a miserable, half putrid, walking nuisance during his life-time, his passage to the grave made more sorrowful, and his end hastened, by the brutal conduct of certain parties, who had benefited by his depraved agency. After the man had given

* *Vide* the Morning Journals.

his evidence before the Parliamentary Committee, he was hunted like a wild beast from grave-yard to grave-yard, where he sought to obtain employment in his filthy avocation. Creatures who subsisted by the daily practice of the most disgusting and unjustifiable mutilations of the dead were set upon him; he was made to feel the force of their vengeance, and but for pecuniary assistance rendered from time to time, he would, I believe, have perished from starvation.

Let us now turn to the testimony of J. C. Copeland, also an ex-gravedigger of St. Ann's, Soho, who informed the Committee that he had seen Fox, and a party who used to assist him in gravedigging in that ground, "play at what is called skittles; put up bones, and take skulls and knock them down; stick up bones in the ground, and throw a skull at them as you would a skittle-ball." * Well might our immortal bard exclaim—

—— "Here's fine revolution, an' we had the trick to see't. Did these bones cost no more the breeding but to play at loggats with them? Mine ache to think on't."

Copeland has seen bodies "chopped up before they were a quarter decayed." So much for the condition of St. Ann's grave-yard on the surface and the vaults underneath the church. About three years since I made an inspection of the grave-yard. I found an enormous quantity of human bones, some mixed with, and others lying upon, the surface of the earth,—a most offensive and scandalous superficial proof of the method of "management" then adopted. I could add much more perchance to the purpose would time permit, but it would be only a recapitulation of the "thrice told tale." The facts, however, above given will afford you some idea of the condition of the sub-surface.

I have so often insisted in my writings that bulk must occupy space, that it seems unnecessary to repeat it. A grave-yard or a vault will contain so many bodies and no more. *Time* should be allowed for the *gradual dissipation* of the invariable gaseous products of human decomposition; but gross cupidity, the desire to make money, has penetrated even into the so-called resting-places of our deceased friends. The enormous fees paid in some places cannot secure for our dead undisturbed repose. The pride, pomp, and circumstance of a funeral is a bitter jest, a biting sarcasm; the bodies of our wives, our daughters, our relatives, are to be exposed to the vulgar gaze, the coarse jests and brutal treatment of men, who, being men, would not, dare not, execute the tasks imposed upon them.†

The means employed in the economy of the London grave-yards consist in having recourse to practices which I some years since ventured to designate by the term "management."‡

In this "management" of the ground, former occupancy is disregarded; coffins are remorselessly broken through, and their contents heaped together in wild confusion, or scattered carelessly over the surface, "*exposed to insult, lewd, and wantonness.*" Great expense is frequently incurred in funerals; the encasement is often strongly made and highly ornamented. It is not difficult, therefore, to account for the fact that second-hand "coffin furniture," nails more

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* *Vide* Parliamentary Report, question 1376.

† *Vide* "Gatherings from Grave-yards," p. 213. ‡ Ibid, p 198.

especially, may be found by the hundred weight at many of the "dealers in marine-stores," nor can we wonder that *coffin-wood has been extensively used as ordinary fuel in low neighbourhoods.*

I now proceed to confirm the above statements by other testimony.

On the 11th of October, 1839, great excitement prevailed in the neighbourhood of Globe Lane, Mile-End, in consequence of the interference of the police to prevent the indecent disinterment of bodies in the burial-ground behind Globe-Fields chapel. It appeared that Mr. Poole, a clerk in the service of the Eastern Counties Railway Company, being stationed on that part of the railroad which runs close to the burial-ground in question, had observed two men and a boy exhuming the bodies buried in one part of the ground, and hurling them, in the most indecent manner, and indiscriminately, into a deep hole, which they had previously made at another part; and considering such a proceeding as somewhat extraordinary, as well as exceedingly indecent, he felt it his duty to call at the police-station-house, in the Mile-End Road, and give information of what he had witnessed. Inspector M'Craw, accompanied by sergeants Parker and Shaw, K 10 and 3, in consequence proceeded to the burial-ground in question, and as they were about to enter, they met a lad with a bag of bones and a quantity of nails, which he said he was going to sell. On examining them, the nails were evidently those which had been taken out of coffins, and the bones seemed to be those of human beings, but the lad denied that they were so, though he acknowledged the nails to have been taken from the coffins. The inspector and serjeants then proceeded to an obscure corner of the ground, and found there a great number of bodies, packed one upon another, in a very deep grave which had been dug to receive them, *and the uppermost coffin was not more than seven or eight inches, at the utmost, from the surface. The breast-plate and nails were removed from the lid, so that they could at once remove the latter, and from the appearance of the body, as well as of the coffin, it appeared to be the remains of a person above the middle rank of life, and to have been interred about a month or six weeks.* On making inquiries, it appeared that the ground was the property of an undertaker, residing in the neighbourhood of Bishopsgate Street; that owing to the low rate of fees, and affording a protection against resurrection-men, by being surrounded by high walls, a great number of burials took place; *but as few would select the remote corner as a place of rest for their friends or relations, it was used for the purpose of removing the bodies of those buried in the better and more crowded part of the ground to make room for others.* The officers said, that the dreadful stench emitted from the half-decomposed bodies, placed in the hole before-mentioned, was sufficient to engender disease in the neighbourhood, upon which the men immediately set about covering them.

Now, these facts were brought before the public in October, 1839,* and I will show you that they were fully substantiated in 1842 before the Parliamentary Committee, of which I have before spoken; that subsequent events have confirmed, in every particular, statements published by me seven years ago,

* *Vide* "Gatherings from Grave-yards," p. 199.

and that more recent circumstances have more especially demonstrated the truth of these published works, and the evidence adduced by me before the Parliamentary Committee.

W. Miller, an ex-gravedigger in Globe Fields Cemetery, Mile-End Road, in his examination before the Parliamentary Committee, states, that it is a private ground, and belongs to Mr. T. Tagg, an undertaker. That many pits have been dug in it for depositing bodies previously interred there. That these bodies came out of coffins which were emptied for others to go into the graves. That the coffins were broken up and burnt. That about twenty deep square pits were dug, about 4 feet wide, and 7 or 8 feet deep. That these pits, capable of containing about a dozen bodies, were filled with them up to the surface within about 2 feet. That they were thus disposed of to make room for other corpses. That he had "dug a matter of 20 such pits" himself. Miller then confirms in every particular the account of the scandalous scene which I have just read to you. He states, that the wood of the coffins was burnt in the house of the sexton, that he has seen the smoke coming out of the chimney of the man's house, and that it has smelt like a piece of meat roasting. That this picker up of unconsidered trifles, the sexton, a "gentleman" of the name of Cauch, who resides opposite, puts on a surplice and reads the "regular church service" over the dead.* Can impiety be more horrible?—will our language afford words sufficiently strong to characterise such conduct? But let us pass on.

In reply to the question, were you in the habit of performing this gravedigging without the use of spirits? Miller says,—no; we were obliged to be half groggy to do it, and we cheered one another and sung to one another. He affirmed that the work was so disgusting, that he was obliged to be half drunk in order to be able to execute it; that he took a quartern of gin, a pot of beer, and a pipe of tobacco, and then his blood began to flow. We will take one further proof from this man's evidence in confirmation. He says (and you will perceive that he speaks in the plural), we used to get a rope, and put it round the bodies' necks, having first taken off the lid of the coffin, and then we dragged them by the rope; and sometimes the head would come off, and the trunk would fall down again; then we used to go down and fix it round the body, and haul it up that way; and sometimes it was so tight, we could not get it off again; and, farther, that it has been a regular practice to chop up dead bodies, that they cut through what came before them, and turned it all out. He has known them cut a body through, leave half in the coffin, and chuck the other half out. Miller says, he felt rather awkward at this kind of work at the beginning, he used to stand and tremble; he could not stomach it all Alas, poor degraded, fallen humanity, there is something even in its worst aspect that reminds us of its origin. This poor wretch, compelled by his necessities, became the degraded instrument of unchecked, reckless, determined avarice, a vice disgusting under all circumstances, but infinitely beyond comparison, more disgusting and injurious in its consequences when it fastens upon *dead* victims, and erects its altar in a rank overgorged grave-yard.

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* *Vide* "Report on the Effect of Interment of Bodies," p. 84, *et seq.*

Soon after the above evidence was given, the proprietor of the ground, Mr. Thomas Tagg, presented himself before the Committee, and requested to be allowed an opportunity of rebutting Wm. Miller's testimony. This was granted. The following is an epitome of his evidence, which I think you will agree with me, instead of rebutting, proves all I have advanced, although Mr. Tagg considers Wm. Miller's evidence altogether false as to the digging about twenty pits, and their being filled with human bodies. He *believes* that no such circumstance could have occurred without his observing it, as he was in the habit of going to the ground sometimes once a week, and sometimes twice a week.

Tagg seems anxious to repudiate any connection between Miller and himself, although he very kindly transfers him to the tender care of his sexton. William Miller was never in *his* employment, he was employed by the sexton; *I* never employ the gravediggers, says Mr. Tagg. Mr. Tagg does not believe that any *such circumstances* deposed to by Miller, the police, and the public press *could have* taken place without his knowledge, and he never saw any pit or pits dug. There are some persons who see, but who will not perceive. Mr. Tagg says that his freehold ground was opened in the year 1820; that it was religiously and solemnly set apart for the purpose of burials by one of the Wesleyan ministers. He never had the ground properly measured, and most probably never will. Mr. Tagg, however, deals in numbers, although he does not know the extent of surface. He tells the Committee that the aggregate number of 9,500 bodies has been buried in his ground, and he considers that not one-half of the ground is occupied. Mr. Tagg's ground contains about 28,756 superficial feet, and would receive about 900, *not* 9,000 bodies. There is also a dead man's receptacle underneath the chapel, and a Sunday school, which stands in the grave-yard. You will perceive that these grave-yards are as vast in their capabilities as the appetites of their proprietors are expansive,—the one will never be full, the other never satisfied.

I shall not devote further time to the remaining evidence of this person, although nothing would be more easy than to demolish it. He understands, and believes, and thinks, when he should know and express his sorrowful conviction and regret, that he has committed by his agents the most offensive, the most immoral, the most dangerous of desecrations. Henry John Parker, No. 10, K division, and William Shaw, a serjeant of the police force, confirmed before the Parliamentary Committee the truth of the statements I have made to you as to the abominable practices in operation in this ground on the 11th of October, 1839.

Although these evidences of management were discovered by the merest accident, they are not the less valuable; they afford irrefragable proof, in conjunction with other evidence of a similar nature, of the necessity that exists for the close and minute supervision of the receptacles of the dead, and that the longer that supervision is deferred, the greater will be the amount of moral and physical injury inflicted upon the living,—the greater the insults offered to the dead.

We have seen how matters are conducted in one of the so-called resting-places for the dead in the eastern part of the Metropolis. Let us now recur to a recent proof of "management" in the City of London. I condense the facts from the newspaper reports of the evidence taken before Mr. Broughton, the magistrate at Worship Street, in the early part of September last.

Several loads of bones and human remains intermixed with pieces of coffin and coffin furniture, which it was alleged had been brought from St. Matthew's, Friday Street, had been shot in a field belonging to a Mr. King, at Haggerstone, by a dust contractor, named Gould. John Roe deposed before the magistrate that he worked for Mr. King, in whose field the rubbish, as it was called, was shot. That the field is an open one, and the public have permission to shoot rubbish there. White, the driver of the cart, after he had pitched on the ground the human material and its adjuncts, asked Roe how much he was to receive for his cart-load of *rubbish*. He was told he was not to get anything, when he replied that if he had known he was not to have *four pence a load*, he should not have shot it there.

Holland, a constable of the N division, deposed to finding the wood of coffins stored away in the back yards of five houses at Haggerstone, and also to finding 43 lb. of metal, consisting of plates, handles, &c., of coffins, at a marine-store in the neighbourhood.

John Gardiner, of 6, Southwark Street, Haggerstone, who first drew attention to this terrible affair, deposed that he saw a number of men, women, and children (there might be 20 or 30 of them) crowding round something in the field. He saw pieces of coffins and lids of coffins, which were very nearly whole, and as sound as if they had not been in the ground for more than two years. He saw human bones in the field with flesh on two of them two inches thick. He saw also a human skull with carroty hair on it. He was no scholar and could not read, but he saw a young man loading a spring-barrow with coffin plates and handles, which he was taking away to sell. His own boy, he understood, picked up some plates, and sold them to the marine-store keeper; he saw many of his neighbours, and an undertaker living close by, take away the wood of the coffins to use as firewood. One woman who took the wood, and boiled her kettle with it, afterwards threw the kettle of water away, as she could not fancy the water, in consequence of its having been boiled with the wood from a coffin. Henry Longman, and another boy, chopped part of a coffin in two. Longman sold one lot of coffin plates and handles of coffins for 11¼*d.*, and another for 5 farthings. White, with his mate Roffey, two of the carters employed by the dust contractor, went to St. Matthew's Church, Friday Street, Cheapside, at 3 o'clock in the morning, to take away rubbish; there were present, the street-keeper, the beadle, the grave-digger, and another person. The rubbish was just inside the church door. He had no extra pay for the job. Had some drink, it was gin. In reply to the magistrate, the defendant said he drank the gin in the church.

A married woman, named Elizabeth Norris, also deposed to the loathsome character of the deposits, the effluvium arising from which was so overpowering

that she with difficulty escaped fainting, and said, that among the refuse that was kicked about, she observed a thigh bone with flesh upon it, as broad as her hand and a foot in length; a spinal bone also with flesh attached to it; a silk handkerchief stained with blood, evidently used to tie up a person's jaw; and a woollen mattrass, still bearing the impression of a human figure.

Holland, the warrant officer, produced several pieces of coffins, and stated that such fragments had been extensively dispersed about the neighbourhood, and that in five houses alone he found at least a cart-load. On being called upon to answer the charge, the defendants severally said that they had been directed by the niece and sister of their master to proceed at 3 o'clock on Saturday morning to cart away some rubbish from the vaults of the church in Friday Street, in which they were assisted by the street-keeper, the gravedigger, and other persons.

The report in the newspapers concludes with the statement that the proceedings attracted the greatest interest, and the court was densely crowded during the investigation, which lasted several hours. Now, monstrous and incredible as these statements may appear, they unmask no new practices, they unveil no special deformity as connected with the so-called burial of the dead in London. Official superintendence, assisted by the shovel, the pickaxe, the sledge-hammer, and the crow-bar, divides those who hoped to repose together quietly in death. Men, women, and children, the living and the dead, are involved in this horrible, this disgusting, this most unchristian desecration. The dust contractor, his niece and sister, in a word, all who permitted, or aided, or assisted, directly or indirectly, are chargeable with its consequences. And who shall chronicle them? Who shall tell us whether these official mutilations, these terrible, these revolting desecrations of the image of the Almighty, will not surely bring down upon us His severe displeasure? Who shall trace the physical effects of the yet unknown but deadly poisons, thus let loose at the will of this or that official?

Let us now inquire a little further into the condition of another burial-place in the City.

Mr. James Anderton, a member of the Common Council of the City of London, has, as you are probably aware, brought the question of interments twice before the members of that court, and has twice carried by acclamation Petitions to the House of Commons for the absolute prohibition of burials within the Metropolis. Mr. Anderton considers our present practice little, if at all, better than burying in our town streets. He applies this objection to all the church-yards within the City of London; says, truly, that they are most of them very small; that they are all of them in very crowded neighbourhoods, in the very heart of the City of London, in fact, in the streets. Mr. Anderton informs the Parliamentary Committee that he has heard innumerable complaints of the state of the church-yards, the effluvium arising therefrom, and the bad effects resulting to persons residing near them. Mr. Anderton considers that burials in vaults under churches is highly objectionable. He has always considered that churches were made for the living, and not for the dead; and illustrates this position by the state of the vaults of St. Martin's, on Ludgate Hill, in the very

heart of the City. The church being under repair, and the vaults requiring "a clearance," no doubt, Mr. Anderton witnessed the process, which consisted in mixing up the bones and decayed coffins with rubbish, in order that the passers-by might not see what was going on. Mr. Anderton made an attempt to go down into the vaults, but was so disgusted that he returned. In answer to the question, you think all the parish burial-grounds within the bills of mortality are in a bad state? Mr. Anderton replies, I think them a disgrace to the country; I think nothing can be worse; and if gentlemen would go round the City and look at the state of the church-yards, the places in which they are situated, and the size of them, I do not think they would want any other opinions than their own. Mr. Anderton concludes by stating that he would decidedly prohibit the burials of all classes, either rich or poor, in the present church-yards, and in churches, too, if in his power to do so.

Dr. J. R. Lynch, who has honourably distinguished himself by his endeavours to benefit the sanatory condition of his fellow-citizens, informs the Committee that the smell from the vaults of St. Martin's, Ludgate Hill, is on the Sabbath day at times awful; it is quite perceptible to any one who enters the church. The consequence is, that the church is very little attended.

The beadle of the parish of St. Martin's, Ludgate, gave important testimony before the Committee of 1842. The following is an epitome of his evidence, so far as it concerns our present object:—He thinks that between 400 and 500 bodies are contained in the vaults of the church. There is no grave-yard. He has on two occasions "cleared out" the vaults. Has frequently perceived smells arising therefrom, more especially in damp or warm weather. It became necessary to remove the corrupt matter that had accumulated in consequence of want of room, and the coffins tumbling one on another. About ten cart-loads were taken away by the contractor who repaired the church. The bodies of parishioners are permitted to be buried in wooden coffins; but if a non-parishioner requires what is called Christian burial in the vault of St. Martin's, Ludgate, his or her body must be enclosed in lead. The church was some years since warmed by stoves, which were so fixed that the air which supplied them was drawn from the vault, so that a smell could be perceived by a person standing close to the stove.

Mr. J. Harvey, a general builder, and who has been 18 or 19 years parish-clerk of St. Andrew Andershaft, gives valuable testimony. He says, that church-yard, whose *greatest* distance from the adjoining houses is about 23 feet, contains a little above 2,000 superficial feet, and is therefore capable of containing, according to calculation, 62 adult bodies. That a great number were buried there during the visitation of the cholera. That the highest coffin is a little above 4 feet from the surface. That from bodies having been buried so thickly, there has been a great deal of obstruction found. That he has seen bodies cut through. That a great deal of coffin wood has been consumed in the fire-places of the church. That the leaden coffins have been appropriated to the profit of the parish;

that the money has been paid over to the church-wardens; that in one instance, they sold three tons of lead, which went to defray the expenses of "clearing out." The witness further states, that they bury as close to the foundations of the church as possible.* That frequently a bad smell is perceptible when graves are opened. That bones have been found in the cellars of houses in Leadenhall Street. When asked to account for the circumstance, Mr. Harvey replies, that it all formed a part of the church-yard formerly, and that if they have anything like an excavation to make, they find many bodies.

Let us now select a fact for which we are indebted to the public press.

A correspondent in the *Times* of September 10, 1846, who signs himself "A Parishioner," says, the removal of human remains from the vault of St. Matthew's church, Friday Street, is only one more of those numerous instances that take place in many of the City churches every ten or twelve years, where no burial-ground is attached to the church [we shall see presently that these "clearings out" take place where burial-grounds *are* attached]. The writer continues,—"in my own parish (St. Martin, Ludgate) this disgusting exhibition took place in the year 1840. This church at that period was undergoing repair, when it was found necessary to, what is termed in vestry, clear out the vault; that is, the vault where the poor are buried in simple wooden coffins. As these piles of human remains fall, it becomes necessary to remove them, and this removal took place opposite my own door, between six and ten o'clock in the morning, was witnessed by many parishioners as well as passers-by, and known to all who attended the vestry."

On this communication I beg to remark, that the well-intentioned correspondent of the *Times* has fallen into a very common, but a very dangerous, error. Leaden coffins are, as I have repeatedly proved, perfectly useless as a means of retaining the gas produced during the decomposition of the dead body. Even the old and much heavier leaden coffin (for in this respect men's coffins, like men's principles, are grown much thinner than they used to be) cannot retain the gas. The leaden coffin offers, however, an inducement to a certain class of robbers who prowl about church-vaults. In confirmation of these observations, I beg to direct your attention to the following remarks and statement of facts published by me some years since:—

"A man was charged before Sir Claudius Hunter (20th March, 1839), at Guildhall, with having in his possession some portions of leaden coffins, which had been stolen from the public vaults of Shoreditch church.

"Sir C. Hunter asked if there was any additional evidence as to the coffin lead?

"The vestry-clerk said there was only one fact, that on one of the cases from which the lead coffin had been stolen, and which now contained the corpse, there was the name of the deceased, corresponding with one of the plates produced, as having been traced to Joseph's.

"Sir C. Hunter observed, that the sanctuary of the dead ought not to be invaded with impunity. The temptation to steal our bodies had been removed by the Legislature; but now the love of gain *tempted persons to steal our coffins.*"

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* For proofs of injury to churches from the practice of gravedigging near their foundations, *vide* "Gatherings from Grave-yards," p. 219.

"In the vaults of a church centrally situate, the burying-ground of which is, on the surface, in a most disgusting condition, a nobleman, and several other persons of distinction, had found their last resting-place.

"In the year ——, a rumour arose in the parish, that the rights of sepulture had been grossly violated; inquiries were instituted, men were employed to replace the bodies in the shells that were left, and from which the lead had been stolen; a hole was dug, into which the remainder of the bodies were thrown. The gravedigger was privately examined before a magistrate; it was found that any proceedings against him would implicate others. The affair was hushed up, and the vault, which had undergone a thorough clearance, was again made available for the purposes of interment,—again, perhaps, to be subjected to a similar purgation, when the eupidity of the gravedigger may be in the ascendant, *or the want of room shall require it.*

"One of these men told me, that some of the bodies were comparatively fresh, and the flesh of others was reduced to a brown and horribly fetid pulp, which left the bones on the slightest touch; but that no serious accident occurred, which can be accounted for by the fact, that the putrefactive process, attended by the evolution of gas, had gone by.

"Four coffins, out of upwards of fifty, alone escaped these brutal depredators of the dead,—that which contained the remains of the nobleman, which it was expected would rest ultimately in ——, according to his last wish, and three others, secured by strong chains, passing through their handles at each end; these were padlocked, and the keys were kept by the survivors."*

"I may here take occasion to inform you, that many thousands of bodies have been deposited in places on the surface *without being placed in lead.* This is a monstrous abuse, and one that ought to have been annihilated in its very origin. I have repeatedly entered places in which vast piles of coffins are deposited; the general smell of the atmosphere is extremely offensive. Here have I seen women of delicate organization, oppressed with grief for the loss of a beloved object, subject themselves to the action of a "malaria," given off in enormous quantities,—possibly themselves specimens of walking sickness, led thither to contemplate the sad remains of what once was an affectionate husband, a beloved child, or relative. This should not be permitted,—*the power of resistance* ought not thus to be experimented with.

"In objecting to the keeping of bodies when in lead, *unless placed in the earth,* and at a proper depth, I am aware that I differ with others upon this subject. Dr. Pascalis, an American physician, says, 'the structure of their coffins, in England, where, among the wealthy ranks, they generally use the churches for burial, seems well adapted to prevent the evils otherwise arising from their imprudent fashion of entombing corpses in the interior of churches; coffins of lead, soldered, lined, and cased in mahogany or walnut, again in oak, and over all, covered with cloth or velvet, may be more secure against pestiferous vapours.' Dr. Pascalis is here in error; the coffin may be of lead, soldered, lined, and cased, yet the pestiferous vapours will frequently escape; this security, therefore, is merely imaginary. Every person who has been accustomed to enter these places can vouch for the truth of this assertion; the disgusting stench in vaults largely ventilated, proves this. Very poisonous gases are the products of the decomposition of the dead; they are generated under all circumstances, whether in the strong and expensive

* *Vide* "Gatherings from Grave-yards," p. 203.

coffins of the rich, or in the frail and imperfectly made shells of the poor. These gaseous products of decomposition, condensed and compressed as they are to considerably less than half their volume, by continual increments from the decomposition of the general tissues, in some instances may be retained by the mere strength of their cases; these, necessarily, must ultimately decay and burst, when the gases generated will be diffused throughout the vault in which they are deposited; whilst, in the grave-yard, the borer of the gravedigger, often employed in searching, is driven through the lid of the coffin, from which volumes of pernicious gases are continually emitted." *

I fear that I am troubling you with a detail too monotonously disgusting; but reasonings, to be worth anything, must be based upon facts. Bear with me, therefore, whilst I bring under your notice some further proofs of the actual condition of the receptacles for the dead in London.

I have alluded previously to the practice of digging deep graves in the midst of a mass of human remains, a system which cannot be too much reprobated. It is, however, I assure you, far too general. I insisted particularly on the results of this deadly and immoral practice some years since before the Health of Towns Committee, when I brought, amongst others, the condition of the grave-yard in Drury Lane, belonging to St. Martin in the Fields, under the notice of Parliament. In the year 1840, it was the practice to dig deep pits in this ground. A receptacle of this kind, 22 feet deep, was made within a few feet of the windows of a dwelling-house. Into this grave projected ten or twelve coffins, some of which had been mutilated, and doubtless many bodies and coffins had been entirely removed in the digging this pit.

In the year 1525, the parish of "St. Martin" was, as its name implies, "in the Fields." In the above year, THIRTEEN bodies were buried in the parish. In 1526, FOURTEEN were buried. In 1527, TWENTY-TWO were buried. In 1528, THIRTEEN were buried. The examination of the sextons' books, commenced in the year 1691, would, as tending to elucidate my subject, be both interesting and important. The burial-ground of this parish, situate on the western side of Drury Lane, contains 10,080 superficial feet. Within a period of *ten years*, 315 *adult bodies*, and no more, might have been buried there, or at the rate of 32 per annum! By an official return, it appears that in *one* year, 565 bodies were disposed of between the above-named burial-ground (?), the one at Camden Town, and the vaults under St. Martin's church. There is little room for doubt, that on an average *three hundred and fifteen bodies*, instead of *thirty-two*, have been interred yearly in the burial-ground in Drury Lane.

There are many here present who will remember the filthy condition of this place some years since, when it was covered with artichokes. It was, as I described it in 1839, luxuriant in rank vegetation, high as men's shoulders, —its surface broken, uneven, and its general aspect repulsive; it was *then*, and now is, a shabby, unchristian depository for the dead,—an abomination to the living.†

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* *Vide* "Gatherings from Grave-yards," p. 205. † Ibid, p. 162.

Formerly, on the north side of this grave-yard, were boarded sunk areas, giving a borrowed light and air to five houses, the property of his Grace the late Duke of Bedford. This burying-ground was originally *below* the surrounding level; *now* it is at least 5 feet *above* the street. This elevation has been gained by packing bodies *stratum super stratum*, until long since it has been impossible to obtain a grave without previous disturbance and mutilation. In a very recent instance, the searcher was repeatedly employed. An old inhabitant well remembers that the areas of which I have spoken were made in self-defence, to prevent the obstruction of light, which was gradually encroached upon, and also to hinder the coffins falling through the ground-floor windows. The above areas projected on an average 3 feet 6 inches into the "grave-yard," and were about 4 feet in depth. Since the removal of the boards, and the substitution of a brick wall, 2 feet have been gained in the entire length and height of the ground; and the areas have been sunk to a depth varying from 8 to 16 feet. Thus has a little more space been gained to deposit fresh centres of infection for the living, by the most unjustifiable disturbance and mutilation of the dead!

The compound of human flesh, bones, tissues, and earth, removed in sinking these areas, and digging a foundation for the wall, it was intended to cart away. Some loads were removed, and others already deposited in the street would have followed, but they were noticed by the passers-by. An outcry was raised; one person, more determined than the rest, sought out the authorities of the parish, and insisted that a stop should be put to such practices. The material deposited in the street was again "wheeled back in barrows," and, with the succeeding masses of earth excavated, spread over the surface of this grave-yard, which was raised considerably in its entire surface by this means. The stench arising from the disturbance of the great number of bodies, and the throwing up of the successive portions of soil, was so abominable, that the men employed refused to continue the work; they were allowed, however, a large quantity of gin and porter, as an encouragement to proceed; £1 9*s*. was paid for drink during one week by the employer of the men who executed this work; they were on several occasions seen intoxicated.

A new "bone-hole" was made about the same period. Four men were employed during eight or ten days in removing the bones from the old receptacle into the new. One of the gravediggers amused himself by noting with chalk the number of skulls which were displaced (upwards of 500) in one day. I find in the churchwardens' account with the parishioners of St. Martin-in-the-Fields, in the year 1840-41, the following items, under the head of "Repairs to Drury Lane Burial-ground:"—

By cash paid, new vaults for depositing bones	£24	14	6
Labourers, digging new vaults, and levelling the ground .	34	3	1
Incidental expenses connected with the above alterations .	18	10	3
Total	£77	7	10

Thus, an expense was incurred which would have *purchased* elsewhere a piece of ground much better adapted for the purposes of burial, of nearly four times the extent of the above grave-yard. So much for the *pecuniary policy* of parish management!

Now, this grave-yard* contains about 11,000 superficial feet, and would give decent burial to 560 adults, and no more. Hence the following detail of a most disgraceful outrage which was perpetrated on the bodies of the dead in St. Martin's Green-ground in Drury Lane, although it will certainly disgust, will scarcely astonish you:—

The surviving relatives and friends of Mr. Foster, of No. 1, Chapel Court, Long Acre, proposed to bury him in this receptacle. In consequence of the disgusting proceedings which took place a few days previously in the Green-ground in Portugal Street, Lincoln's Inn Fields, when the body of Mr. Jacob Burns was forced into a hole better fitted for the reception of the carcase of a dog than for the last resting-place of a human being, Mr. Francis Sloman and Mr. John Curtis, at the desire of the family of the deceased, undertook to superintend the arrangements for making the grave. Finding that the gravediggers had made the grave only 2½ feet deep, they at once told them that the friends of the deceased would not allow him to be buried at so shallow a depth. "Wont they," observed the men; "then if they do not, here is a coffin," pointing to one under their feet, "which we must remove;" and, suiting the action to the word, they sent the pickaxe into the coffin, taking off the lid, and exposing the mortal remains of its pale tenant. They then put the axe under the coffin, which they thus overturned, throwing out the corpse, and smashing and mixing it up with the clay. They threw up the coffin, and wheeled it away, for the purpose, as alleged by parties on the ground, of burning it; after which they returned to their work and shovelled up the flesh and bones which they had mixed with the clay. After they had cleared that away, the friends of the deceased observed that even then the grave was not sufficiently deep. "Oh," rejoined the gravediggers, "if that is the case there are two other coffins underneath which we will also remove, and as we have made a beginning we will go on." Satisfied that they would thus deepen the grave, the friends of the deceased returned to the house for the purpose of accompanying the funeral procession to the church-yard. Upon reaching the latter place, they were convinced, from the depth of the grave, that the two other coffins and their contents were treated like the first. The widow and children of the deceased, hearing how the three other bodies had been outraged, expressed their fears that deceased's coffin and body would be also broken up when want of room required it. Their fears had such an effect upon them that they could be scarcely induced to leave the burial-ground, which they, however, at last did, crying and screaming most distressingly. The scene was so heartrending that even Mr. Whitaker, who superintended the funeral, accustomed as he is to such melancholy spectacles, could not refrain from tears. In fact, the whole assembly sympathised and wept with the widow and orphans. The plate of one of the coffins broken up bore the date of 1837.†

Under a building in which the clergyman robes himself previous to reading the burial-service in this ground, there is a large depôt for broken-up coffins and coffin-furniture. Little else than coffin wood is burnt in the house of the present

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* *Vide* "Gatherings from Grave-yards," p. 235. † *Morning Herald*, Nov. 6, 1843.

gravedigger, who resides on the spot. The smell is at times so insufferable as to have produced in my own person a feeling of nausea, whilst I have often given utterance to sentiments of disgust and indignation, and have wondered that such barefaced insults to the living, necessarily preceded by the most disgusting exposure and dismemberment of the dead, should go unpunished.*

There is something essentially wrong in the morality of the people who permit, or the officials who wink at, such abominable and deadly practices.

I have noticed during many years that when accident has from time to time dragged into light the consequences, the inevitable results, of thrusting dead bodies into places utterly inadequate to contain them, parish officers and others, seemingly only just awakened from a long lethargy, start up, rub their eyes, set their dead men's houses in order, by clearing up the surfaces of the grave-yards and vaults, and painting over the gates, entrances, &c. connected therewith. Thus, St. Martin's ground, in Drury Lane, has recently been re-decorated, and a newly painted notice-board tells the passer-by in the following terms that its insatiable appetite is yet unglutted:—

ST. MARTIN IN THE FIELDS.

Applications respecting Funerals in this Burial-ground, or inquiries relative thereto, must be made to

Mr. COBBETT, 115, *Long Acre, or*
Mr. S. BEDFORD, 26, *Villiers Street,* } *Sextons.*

By Order { *HENRY JOSEPH HALL,*
WILLIAM H. DALTON, } *Churchwardens.*
October, 1846.

The notice conveys, in other words, this intimation, that its managers invite—publicly invite, the living to pay them so much a-piece for every grave made in earth already so long saturated with corruption as to be utterly incapable of giving safe and decent, much less Christian, burial to their deceased friends.

I will give you an additional justification of the language above employed. A man bowed down by misfortune, and labouring under chronic and incurable disease of the foot and ankle, had buried the bodies of his aunt and child in the grave-yard in Drury Lane. He had occupied during many years workshops detached from his house, which overlooked the burial-place. Opposite and immediately underneath one of his workshop-windows were deposited in one grave the two bodies. Unable during many months to do any kind of work, he let his back premises, and requested the tenant to watch from time to time, and give him notice, if any attempt should be made to break into his family grave. The old gravedigger had been succeeded by another, who, unintentionally perhaps, broke into the receptacle, of whose locality he had no previous knowledge. The relative of the deceased being instantly informed of the circumstance, hurried down stairs, crossed the yard dividing his house from the workshops, and with much difficulty and great bodily suffering reached the window, and there saw on the surface of the grave-yard the dismembered fragments of the bodies once so dear to him; that since their inhumation, as he informed me, he

* *Vide* "Gatherings from Grave-yards," p. 234.

had a melancholy consolation in watching the spot where they lay, and almost selfishly congratulating himself that amidst the horrible up-turnings and desecrations he had during many previous years so frequently been compelled to witness, his own deposit had as yet escaped mutilation. I chanced to call on him soon after the occurrence, and found him in tears; his nervous system had received a violent and rude shock; the exertion he had made had been most injurious to him, and I have no doubt the combined circumstances shortened his passage to the house appointed for the living.

In the inquiries which I have been led to make relative to the interment of the poor, I have been forced to arrive at the conclusion that poverty is regarded as a crime which pursues its object even beyond the grave. To the poor man, the house of death is no resting-place.

In the month of August, 1840, a poor man died at a wretched hovel in Paradise Row, Chelsea, and was *buried in the usual way by the parish.* A judicial inquiry was instituted, and it was necessary to exhume the body. The gravedigger opened the hole, and after searching for some time, declared his inability to find it. The Coroner (Mr. Wakley) inquired of the summoning-officer the precise number of bodies interred in the same pit? The officer replied, to the best of his recollection, there were twenty-six bodies. The Coroner wished to be informed if they rammed them down with a rammer? The officer said, he was not aware they resorted to such a process, but the bodies of paupers were packed together as closely as possible, in order to make the most of the space. The Coroner observed, that such a system of burial was revolting to humanity, and reflected the highest disgrace on a Christian country. Such practices, however, often bring with them their punishment.

In March, 1841, another fatal proof was afforded of the shocking condition of the soil of the London grave-yards. The gravedigger of St. Bride's, Fleet Street, and two assistants, were employed in opening a pit 20 feet deep for the interment of the dead. Two of the men, more experienced than the third, escaped; large quantities of earth, and an entire pile of coffins, fell upon and crushed the man who was unable to get out of the grave. Such was the rotten state of the ground that as the men dug, it fell in, in masses, and upwards of seven hours were employed in the most severe and indefatigable exertions before his body could be recovered, although the labourers had every mechanical assistance that blocks, falls, pullies, hooks, &c. could afford. His head, pressed against the end of the pit, was discovered after two hours' digging. As if in revenge for the insults offered them, two dead bodies had rested themselves on his chest, whilst his legs, jammed between other coffins, and embedded in the earth, could not for many hours be extricated. Thus another "grave-yard" divulged to the many the secret of its condition, which had long, however, been known to the few. So effectually, so diligently, had this ground been worked, so well charged with rottenness and corruption, so well incorporated with the bones, flesh, and tissues of decayed and decaying human bodies, that the natural cohesiveness of the soil had been destroyed; the loose state of the ground

was such that as fast as the workmen dug the earth it continued to fall in on all sides. The poor fellow Thompson, who thus miserably perished at the age of 22, was the sole support of an aged mother. Before closing my observations in reference to the above grave-yard, I may mention that I have been informed by a respectable person whose house is situated opposite the east end of the church, that frequently, in warm and moist weather, the stench arising from the church-yard is so obnoxious as to compel him to close his windows if they happen to be open at the time.

I will now trouble you to accompany me in our visit of inspection to another place which was spoken of in terms of high commendation by a reverend gentleman who gave evidence before the Parliamentary Committee in 1842. Recent events have called the public attention to the *interior* management of the workhouse of St. Pancras. This poor-house is situated close to the burial-place belonging to the parish of St. Giles's. A letter addressed to Mr. E. F. Smith, and read by him at a meeting of the rate-payers of St. Pancras on the 28th of September last, thus describes the condition of the pauper whilst living; we shall subsequently see how he is treated when dead. H. James, the writer, says, "six of us were confined in a miserable dungeon called the Refractory-room or Black-hole, to undergo a sentence of forty-eight hours close confinement; and close enough it was, for this black-hole had no windows or fire-place. The door was cased or lined with iron, and locked and bolted outside. The weather then (August) being exceedingly warm, they complained of the close confinement, and it seems that as a punishment, a board was nailed over the small air-hole that previously existed on the north side of the workhouse; thus the draft and air, he says, were entirely stopped, there was no ventilation whatever, and they were almost suffocated. Several holes made in the wall forming a portion of the Black-hole admitted the foul air and the stench from the adjoining burying-ground." He further states, that the abominable stench that came in upon them turned them all quite sickly, there not being an escape for it; and that the confinement was inflicted as a punishment for applying for relief.

I took the earliest opportunity of making inquiries into some of the allegations of the letter I have just read to you. I conversed with James, who, with several other paupers was, on the Lord's day, looking through a window in the oakum-room strongly barred with iron. This window overlooked the grave-yard. James, the writer of the letter (the whole of which should be carefully read and well pondered over), informed me that he was quite prepared to substantiate all he had said; and, indeed, much more.

At one end of the grave-yard wall is situated the infirmary or hospital for the sick, at nearly the other extremity the place of confinement of which we have above spoken. The locality of both these places must be most injurious, and therefore most objectionable. A wall divides the LIVING from the DEAD; the two erections are in fact formed on the side of the grave-yard by the wall itself, and there are grates and holes in the wall admitting the odour from dead bodies

in every stage and degree of decomposition, which I know have been, and continue to be, deposited in the immediate neighbourhood of the wall of the hospital in pits many feet deep; in fact, they constitute literally a pavement of many thousands of dead paupers, festering and rotting under the noses of the afflicted living ones on the other side of the wall.

These deposits, as you are aware, have been increased by the remains of upwards of 2,000 human bodies within the last three months, in consequence of the up-turning of the burial-ground in the rear of St. Giles's workhouse, in Short's Gardens, Drury Lane.

Facts like these need no comment, they illustrate themselves. I will, however, secure the occasion to express my regret that the agents of these most shocking, and I think utterly unjustifiable, refinements of cruelty have, so far as I know, escaped the castigation of the press; and I am further desirous of recording my deliberate opinion and conviction, that in far too many instances many who call themselves GUARDIANS are rather the oppressors of the poor, for it is a lamentable fact, as I have proved to you, that those who are appointed to dole out the rations, such as they are, for the poor and unfortunate, are not guiltless of the crime of compelling those committed to their charge to breathe, to take into their blood, in fact, an atmosphere so offensive, so disgusting, and so deadly, as not to admit of any degree of comparison with any other.

As I have before remarked, the terms employed in describing the condition of this cemetery were so much more flattering than I thought it deserved, that soon after the Parliamentary Committee had concluded its labours, I again visited the place for the purposes of inquiry and inspection. It was admitted before the Committee, of which I have above spoken, that the average of burials was then nearly 1,400 per annum, the majority doubtless of the poorer class. The following remarks, published by me in 1842, were fully justified by its then condition:—"An open pit dug under the wall dividing the cemetery from the workhouse (of St. Pancras) was full nearly to the surface with pauper bodies; the buzzing of myriads of flies in and over this pit might be heard at a considerable distance from its mouth. A short distance from it I found projecting into four *open private graves* four coffins, the tops of which were not more than 9 inches from the surface."* Such was the condition of things so much lauded before a Committee of the Imperial Legislature in 1842,—the boasted advantages it possesses over that disgraceful receptacle of corruption, the OLD GROUND situated round St. Giles's church.

These are the unmistakable evidences of the "management" of the "clergyman who lives there, who is also the sexton, who takes a great interest in it, who makes it as acceptable as he can, whose arrangements have been considered very judicious."† On this I beg to observe that I consider the "arrangements" of which I have above spoken anything but "judicious" to the poor creatures

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* *Vide* "Interment and Disinterment," p. 9.

† *Vide* "Report on the Effect of Interment of Bodies," p. 75, question 1453.

immured in the workhouse, or confined in the Black-hole at St. Pancras,—anything but "acceptable;" and I think it an insolent stretch of authority, and an unprincipled application of the system of might against right to subject living humanity to such an infliction.

Need I remind you that in the complex, everchanging, pecuniary relationships of English society, facts are constantly demonstrating that the rich man of to-day may become a pauper to-morrow. This case may in degree be yours or mine; and we may ask ourselves, if overtaken, after a life expended well and worthily, by unexpected misfortune, which we in our earthly wisdom might perhaps deem undeserved, whether we, the descendants of the men who, under God's blessing, have made England a mere speck as it were on the map, what she is among the great of the earth, whether we would not desire (and God forbid we may be compelled to seek it) more humane guardianship than that afforded within or without the division wall of the CEMETERY and the WORKHOUSE of St. Pancras; or, in plainer language, I would again ask, whether we should not be entitled to receive the treatment due to Christians whilst living,—whether we should not be entitled to demand a Christian burial when dead?

There are, I should inform you, in most burial-places several divisions of the same surface; these vary in price, and it may be, for aught I know, in quality However that may be, wide distinctions in life are followed by even greater distinctions, if not wider divisions, in death. The pauper whose feelings and sympathies are so rudely trampled upon during his earthly probation, has not even the melancholy satisfaction of knowing that he may repose in death with those whom he loved during life. He is accorded, however, the privilege of forming an unit amongst other undistinguishable masses of mortality; he may lie cheek by jowl with his fellows during a brief sojourn; he may rot in company with them in huge charnels,—fit emblems of the depths and extent of his earthly misery; whilst, even worse than all, the poor creature, whose perception of right and wrong may be as keen, and even more discriminative, than that of those who chain him to so terrible a destiny,—feels that he is breathing the sublimated particles of the dead bodies of those who, packed even closer than bales of inorganic merchandise, have gone before him to their eternal account.

Thus the pauper's history is soon told; he is subjected to inconceivable mental indignities, whilst his physical condition is deteriorated; and so injuries are inflicted, and strange anomalies perpetrated; and a nation that has been lavishly profuse of her blood and treasure on infinitely less worthy objects, commits a gross injustice by tacitly permitting those who have the most imperative claims upon her sympathies and assistance to be subjected to the brutal control of hard-hearted and too often unprincipled task-masters, who inflict upon her poor the double punishment—the double curse—of a minimum of bad food—a maximum of bad air.

THE END.